

An Interview with
PATRICIA
MANKINS

An Oral History produced by
Robert D. McCracken

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Nye County Commissioners
Tonopah, Nevada
89049



Patricia Mankins
1989

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PREFACE

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the NCTHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the NCTHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;
- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;
- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and
- e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes—in many cases as a stranger—and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have long known and admired; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and Nevada—too numerous to mention by name—who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. “Bobby” Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project in 1987. Subsequently, Commissioners Richard L. Carver, Dave Hannigan, and Barbara J. Raper provided support. In this current round of interviews, Nye County Commissioners Andrew Borasky, Roberta “Midge” Carver, Joni Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Peter Liakopoulos provided unyielding support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the program within Nye County in its first years. More recently, Darrell Lacy, Director, Nye County Nuclear Waste Repository Project Office, gave his unwavering support. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Lacy’s office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioner Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Mr. Lacy for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Lacy.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Kimberley Dickey provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Jean Charney, Julie Lancaster, and Darlene Morse also transcribed a number of interviews. Proofreading, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Marilyn Anderson, Joni Eastley, Julie Lancaster, Teri Jurgens Lefever, and Darlene Morse. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as best as possible, the spelling of people’s names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Long-time Pahrump resident Harry Ford, founder and director of the Pahrump Valley Museum, served as a consultant throughout the project; his participation was essential. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

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—Robert D. McCracken
2009

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while most of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region—stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County—remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890, most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be so for at least another twenty years.

The spectacular mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), Rhyolite (1904), Manhattan (1905), and Round Mountain (1906) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, much of it essentially untouched by humans.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the Round Mountain Nugget, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. The Rhyolite Herald, longest surviving of Rhyolite/Bullfrog's three newspapers, lasted from 1905 to 1912. The Beatty Bullfrog Miner was in business from 1905 to 1906. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All these communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities once their own newspapers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, published as part of the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 resides in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) in 1987. The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County

libraries, Special Collections in the Lied Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique—some are large, others are small—yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 700 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral histories as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories have also been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impact of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions and quality of life of Nye County communities that may be impacted by the repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for a long time and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided at the site. And in the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

—RDM
2009

Interview with Pat Mankins and Robert McCracken at Ms. Mankins's home in Pahrump, Nevada, November 20, 2008.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Pat, let's start with you telling me your name as it reads on your birth certificate.

PM: Well, it's different. I was born in Oppello, Arkansas, and I was Patsy Sue Spears. When I got to high school, I decided that Patsy Sue was just not appropriate so I changed it to Patricia and it's been Patricia ever since.

RM: And what was your birthday?

PM: June 4, 1932.

RM: What was your father's name as it read on his birth certificate?

PM: Eurek Rivers Spears.

RM: And when and where was he born?

PM: In Arkansas, but I can't remember the name of the town; I think it was Houston.

RM: And how did he earn a living, particularly in the years that you were growing up?

PM: He was a farmer part of the time and he was a professional gambler.

RM: Did he make money?

PM: Not much. [Laughter] It was the Depression years.

RM: Did you spend most of your childhood in Arkansas?

PM: No, we left Arkansas when I was eight and went to Porterville, California.

RM: And what did your father do there?

PM: He worked and farmed.

RM: And what was your mother's maiden name?

PM: Beatrice Ophelia Wood. She was also born in Arkansas; it must have been Oppello.

RM: How many siblings did you have?

PM: I had five. I was the oldest.

RM: And when you were eight, you moved to Porterville. Why did the family leave Arkansas?

PM: It was the Depression and there was no money in Arkansas so we moved to California to see if we could do better.

RM: Does anything stand out in your mind about Porterville and your life and youth there?

PM: Not too much; it was pretty ordinary. You went to school and you went home and you played in sports and did normal things.

RM: How big was Porterville then?

PM: Eight thousand.

RM: And it was basically a farming town, wasn't it? What were they growing?

PM: Cotton and asparagus and potatoes; mostly things you eat.

RM: So you went to school in Porterville, and what happened after you got out of school?

PM: I got married when I was a senior. I married "Bill" Mankins, Leslie Mankins. He worked there and we lived there for about a year and then we moved to Sacramento and he became an iron worker. In '54 he went to work at Mercury. We got a homestead in Pahrump and lived here and he worked at Mercury.

RM: That was in the days of open-air nuclear testing, wasn't it? So he was working out on Yucca Flats and Frenchman Flats?

PM: Yes, he was.

RM: How did he hear about the job at Mercury?

PM: I think he had a friend working there—Harlis was from Porterville.

RM: Was Bill from Porterville? His roots, his family, were there?

PM: Yes.

RM: Tell me when you first heard of Pahrump.

PM: His friend Harlis Wall, who got him the job at Mercury, had a cousin who had a homestead in Pahrump. He had a homestead in Pahrump so this cousin had one also.

RM: What was the cousin's name?

PM: Frank Maxwell. They came out and surveyed the homestead area and took a homestead for themselves. We bought Frank Maxwell's homestead.

RM: Where was that located?

PM: Down in the Homestead area. Right now it's on Vicki Ann and Manse.

RM: How big was the homestead that you purchased?

PM: We purchased 160 acres. It was just a homestead entry. You had to prove up on it in those days in order to be able to get the deed. Later we bought another one across the street, another 160 acres, and we had to prove up on that. I think the funny part of that is when we got through proving up on it, land in Pahrump was selling for \$60 an acre; we had \$100 an acre in ours. [Laughter] We couldn't even sell it for what we had in it.

RM: What did you have to do to prove up?

PM: First of all, you had to get water, which was a problem. We drilled four wells before we got enough water. Then you had to put a crop in and you had to make sure that you proved beneficial use on it. After you did all that, then they would give you the deed.

RM: How much water did you have to prove up?

PM: You had to have enough for 80 acres, I think it was.

RM: And how many acres did you put in, in crops to prove it up?

PM: I think we put 80 in.

RM: What did you put in on your first homestead?

PM: Wheat.

RM: Did wheat grow well here?

PM: It grew really well but we weren't farmers so we didn't know anything about it. We called Harry Ford's father, Stan Ford, to come and harvest it for us. We didn't even make enough wheat to pay the harvester. [Laughs] We decided we were not farmers.

RM: And when did you buy the homestead across the street?

PM: That was in '58 or '60.

RM: And you had to prove up on that one, too.

PM: Yes, the same thing applied.

RM: And what crop did you put in there?

PM: Wheat again.

RM: Did you do better this time?

PM: No.

RM: You have to plant crops more than one year, don't you?

PM: We farmed for two or three years but then we quit doing that. In those days they weren't so particular about your keeping your water rights up to date. We farmed for two or three years and then in 1977, I think it was, we said goodbye to farming.

RM: And in the meantime, Bill was working at the Test Site?

PM: He worked there until '62 and then we owned the only service station in town, on the corner where Bank of America is. We ran that along with a little store and. . . .

RM: When he was an iron worker at Mercury, would he commute over the Johnnie road? That was a dirt road then, wasn't it?

PM: In '62 or so it was blacktop; he helped with that. You know how they light them at night, the pots? He worked on that.

RM: So at first, he was commuting over the dirt road to work. Was that tough for him?

PM: It was tough for him and for me because if he didn't come home, I had to go find him. [Laughter] And he worked out at the one that's so secret, Area 51. I went to get him one night because he didn't come home and nobody would say they had ever heard of him. I went round and round and finally I got one of his friends out of bed and they said, "No, he's okay."

They had to send him to Los Alamos to be decontaminated. They had sent him down in a hole to retrieve something that had not gone off and when he came out he was so contaminated that he couldn't come home. They decontaminated him and then the next day he came home.

RM: Did he suffer any ill effects from that? He didn't glow in the dark? [Laughter]

PM: No, he didn't. But every time I went through a thing where they would inform the public I would always say, "Does that damage the genes?" I had Teresa after that.

He had some stories to tell. He said one time some senators were coming out to examine the place and they were doing things they didn't want the Senate to know about so they put canvas on everything.

The senators wanted to go up on this one tower and they went up 700 feet. When they opened the elevator, the iron workers stepped out but the senators wouldn't get out. [Laughter]

RM: And he worked how long at the Test Site?

PM: He worked there from '54 till '62.

RM: And meanwhile, he was farming.

PM: Yes, and running the service station. We bought that in 1960.

RM: How much did you pay for your first homestead?

PM: Five hundred dollars, but it was just an entry. The second one was also \$500.

RM: And then you lost money from there on.

PM: Oh, absolutely. He worked and we spent it on the farm.

RM: So his job at Mercury was supporting your land aspiration.

PM: That's right. And I taught school after a while and that helped, too.

RM: Did you live down on the homestead?

PM: Yes, we did. We bought a house out at Boulder City, one of those Boulder Dam houses that were superfluous. We moved it out here and lived in it.

RM: Could you describe the house?

PM: It was a little two-room house, about 500 square feet.

RM: Was that a big job, moving those houses like that?

PM: In those days it didn't seem to be too much. We had a mover from Las Vegas come out and move it.

RM: Was it expensive to move it?

PM: No, it was pretty reasonable.

RM: And then you had water on your place.

PM: Yes, they drilled the house well by hand. My brother-in-laws and Bill took an auger and drilled it by hand.

RM: How deep was it?

PM: I think 30 feet, 35 feet.

RM: Was that about the general depth of water down there?

PM: Yes, it was. And then we went to Indian Springs and bought a windmill and set it up so it would pump the water. We were pretty self-sufficient.

RM: Did you have power then?

PM: No, not at that point. We had a little generator. We ran it when I came in from school. We'd turn that on and do the ironing and whatever you had to do and then turn it off.

RM: When did you start teaching school?

PM: I think it was 1960, maybe '59.

RM: Did you teach here in Pahrump? What was the school like?

PM: We had about 62 students and I had three grades, first, second, and third. The other two teachers had the other grades divided out.

RM: Had you taught school before?

PM: No, I finished my degree in Las Vegas.

RM: And did you commute to do that?

PM: Yes, I drove back and forth.

RM: That's not getting your degree the easy way, is it?

PM: No, it isn't. I started teaching with a two-year degree because that was temporary and they'd let you teach that way then. After that, I commuted to finish my degree. I started in '59 and finally got my degree in '67. I'd do supply runs for our business, pick up all the supplies, and go to school and then come home.

RM: Were you teaching, too?

PM: At that point, no. When I went back to finish I was not.

RM: Where was the school located when you first started teaching?

PM: Where Manse School is today.

RM: And what did it consist of?

PM: Three classrooms for first through eighth grade. The high school students went to Shoshone.

RM: Do you see any of your former students?

PM: Quite a few of my students are still living here. Lauri Woner . . . she's not Lauri Woner now, she's Lauri Walls. She works for Valley Electric. I was really proud that some of my kids have gone a long way. One of them was head of Citibank in Las Vegas—Jose Troncoso was one of the managers in there.

RM: He was one of your students?

PM: One of my second graders. He came up here not knowing a word of English.

RM: What a success story. What were the challenges in teaching here?

PM: A lack of supplies. We had to buy everything we used, almost. There were just very few supplies—books, balls—anything you needed to work with. Mostly we had to buy it ourselves.

RM: Using your own money?

PM: Oh, yes. I think teachers still do that today but they have a lot more to start with than we had.

RM: How many years did you teach before you went back to finish your degree?

PM: I taught until my daughter was born in '62 and I started back again probably about '64. By that time we were running the service station. I wasn't teaching then but I went back to

finish my degree. Then I came back and started teaching again and I taught another three or four years.

RM: Do you remember what your pay was when you started?

PM: I was making \$8,000 a year when I quit and my aunt in Arkansas had been teaching about 30 years and she was making \$4,400 so we didn't have it that bad. [Laughs]

RM: Were there any other challenges that you had to face here that, say, a teacher in Las Vegas would not have faced?

PM: I used to drive a school bus when the bus driver didn't show up, and we didn't have the janitors so you had to clean your own room. There were quite a few little odd-ball things. One year I taught down at the community center, the one we have right now. That was my very best year; I only had the second grade. I had about 25 or 30 students and we did exactly as we wanted to. I think that was my favorite class.

RM: Why were there so many students, or was that just natural growth?

PM: It was just natural growth. When I first came here there was nobody here except farmers and Mexican imports who would come in to work.

RM: Talk about the people who were living in the valley when you got here.

PM: The Fords were here and the Hughes, Leon Hughes and his family. Red Hughes was his brother. Their father had come before, as you know. Leon's father and mother were working on the Pahrump Ranch. They had gone by the time we actually had got there; the Moores had come in and they were running it.

RM: Did you get to know the Hughes at all?

PM: The only ones I really ever knew were Leon and his family and Red, and Red didn't have a family then. Gwen, Leon's wife, was a really wonderful woman. She drove the school bus to Las Vegas after they started sending them to Las Vegas. And most of the kids were really nice kids.

RM: Tell me about the Moores, who were running the ranch.

PM: They were living down on the Pahrump Ranch—Beverly and her husband; I can't remember their names. They were here for probably four or five years before Walt Williams bought it. They were really nice people. After Walt bought it, they left.

RM: What were they growing on the Pahrump Ranch when the Moores were here?

PM: Cotton, mostly.

RM: And what were you growing on your ranch during this period?

PM: We were not growing anything. We were then running the business, and prior to that the only thing we ever planted really was wheat.

RM: Why did you choose wheat?

PM: Because it would grow and you didn't have to have an allotment. Cotton was a very strongly held allotment. If you couldn't get an allotment, you weren't going to grow cotton.

RM: Did you ever get one?

PM: No, we gave up too soon.

RM: Tell me some more about the people in the valley at that time.

PM: Well, Tim Hafen and Eleanor, his first wife, and their children were here, and all the Bowmans. There was Elmer Bowman and his wife and all the kids—we were great friends with Arlen and Kenna Framer, one of their daughters and her husband.

Elmer was a card, he really was. He could be a real son-of-a-gun and a lot of people didn't like him but I happened to really like him. We always got up very early and after we had moved down to this house from the corner in about '64, Elmer used to get up and ride his herd early in the morning because the cattle ran free in the valley. He'd go and watch his herd early in the morning and we could depend on him knocking on our door about 5:00 for coffee every morning. At that point he had cancer and he was drinking creosote tea.

RM: Oh, that was thought to be a cure, wasn't it?

PM: Yes. He'd come in and I'd fix his hot water and he'd make his creosote tea and sit there and drink it. It was awful.

RM: Did it work?

PM: I don't know. He lasted quite a while.

RM: What else do you recall about Elmer?

PM: Well, I don't know whether I really ought to tell this one.

RM: We can take it out if you want.

PM: Okay. Elmer really got things done. If he wanted something done, you could bet it was going to get done. There were no brothels in Pahrump at all. Well, Mabel owned Callahan's bar down here at the end on the way to Shoshone and she opened up a brothel. She had some girls working there and he didn't want that to happen in this town and this is the story—I don't know that it's true but it's the story. He sent some people down who planted some dope and he sent the DEA and they closed her down and that was the end of brothels for many years.

RM: Is that right? And that may or may not be true.

PM: I think it's mostly true. And we didn't have brothels for a long, long time.

RM: Being so small in the early days and being so far from the county seat, were you kind of on your own down here?

PM: Yes. We usually had a \$50-a-month sheriff—whoever would take the job. [Laughs]

RM: Who were some of the sheriffs?

PM: Shorty Andres had it for a while—he didn't do much. And then we got Ed Siri. He really was a good sheriff. He and Pauline lived here and ran a butcher shop. He still didn't have much money, but he'd hunt mountain lions and things like that. The one thing that I remember about him is one day he came in the service station and this guy who was driving a Cadillac was paying his bill inside. Ed walked in, threw up his arm, twisted it behind him, and arrested him right there. We were totally shocked. The guy had stolen the car in Las Vegas and Ed had gotten the information so he arrested him right there. He was a tough guy. We felt pretty safe with him.

RM: How many people were living in Pahrump when you got here?

PM: Probably not more than 120.

RM: And tell me how they were distributed.

PM: Very sparsely. The Bowmans and the Hafens were up in the Manse Ranch, in the Hafen part. There was nothing all the way down the road. Saddle West wasn't here; there wasn't anything like that. It came all the way down to Highways 372 and 160, where we had our business on the corner and there were a few people in this area; not many, but a few. And then there were people down at the north end. The Dorothys had a place down there and there were about four farms between the Dorothys and Mesquite. There were people on those farms but not many.

RM: Who were they? Could you recall?

PM: Ezra and Beulah McCowan had a place. As I said, the Dorothys—they had the big place on the far end.

RM: How big was the McCowan place?

PM: It was about 320 acres. The Brady brothers had a place up there and Zula and Al Simpkins had one and there were a couple more.

RM: Was Blosser here then?

PM: Yes, he was, and Pecksteins had their ranch, and I think that's about it.

RM: And they were farming?

PM: Yes, they were.

RM: And then, who was living in what I think of as the central area? Pop Buol's old store wasn't too far from where you are right here, is it? Who all was living in the central area?

PM: There was kind of a group of Indians down around Pop Buol's store.

RM: What were they living in?

PM: Trailers.

RM: Do you remember any names?

PM: The Sackets were there, and Mamie Steve; she had two daughters. Phil, the electrician, lived down there with Mamie Steve.

RM: He was a white?

PM: He was white and he was a drunk. He was a real bad drunk and a great electrician. And this is how he'd check to find out if your power was working.

RM: He'd lick his fingers?

PM: He'd lick his fingers and let the power run through.

RM: He didn't mind being shocked.

PM: I think he was so petrified, he didn't know. [Laughter]

RM: That's funny. When you were teaching, did you have Indian children in your classes and were they different from the white children?

PM: They were pretty much like the white children except they didn't have much home life. I had one little boy in the second grade who came to school and his eyes were red all the time and it really bothered me. I finally got through to his mother and said this kid needs somebody to look at his eyes. Well, he had a brain tumor. Nobody had paid any attention to it and he died.

RM: Oh, that's sad. Were most of the Indians living down in the Pop Buol area?

PM: The Raycraft Subdivision, which this is a part of, had been an Indian settlement at one time and they had lived down there. That's where all the arrowheads and things come from. There was a smattering of them around. The Manse Ranch, of course, had had Indians.

RM: So this area where you're living now was originally part of the Raycraft Ranch.

PM: Yes. The Raycraft Subdivision goes up to the next road, which is East Street, and it went all the way back over past the school and back down and around.

RM: Do you recall any other high points or memorable things from your teaching work?

PM: I think we had a very efficient school for what we had to work with. It turned out some pretty good kids who really went on to have fairly good careers. Mr. Thoreson was the principal and Mrs. Blosser was one teacher and I was another one when we first started. Then Vera Hughes came in and she and her cousin taught here for a while.

RM: Was she related to Leon?

PM: She was married to Leon, but after he had his family. It was a second marriage. The main thing is that we took pride in what we did.

RM: Did you put on school programs and that kind of thing?

PM: Yes, we certainly did. We did Maypole dances and we had very efficient parent-teacher interactions.

RM: The parents were involved, for the most part?

PM: Oh, yes they were. I don't think schools today do as good a job as we did then but I think all older people say the same thing.

RM: I think both things are true—I think they don't do as good a job and older people say that.

PM: I'm sure my mother said the same thing. [Laughs] My great-grandchildren go to the Christian Community School and they do a good job and they're doing it with computers and

very little to work with. So it can be done but I'm not sure that public schools are doing as good a job as they should.

CHAPTER TWO

RM: What were your thoughts the first time you drove into the Pahrump Valley?

PM: Oh, it was awful. [Laughs] We came in from California, and Bill had gotten this idea that he wanted to buy this homestead and we had to look at it. His mother and dad and he and I and Roy came in from Shoshone. Well, of course, we hit a dirt road about as soon as we hit Nevada. We came in and turned in front of the old bar down there on Highway 372 and we went up the back way through all these trees because that was the trail out to where we were going.

We got up so far and the tail water had crossed the road so we couldn't go that way. By this time, we were buried in dirt. We turned around and came back and then we couldn't get in any other way so we had to go all the way down where Manse is on Highway 160 today. We turned down that road and came back through the back way and got to our homestead. Needless to say, by that time we were so dirty and I had no idea that I wanted to live in Pahrump.

RM: And what season was it?

PM: It must have been about April or May.

RM: And what was going through your mind?

PM: I was thinking he was going to take me to the end of the world. [Laughter] It was a mess. Anyway, it was a man's place. It was a pioneer place and women did not like it but men did.

We used to have a women's club and they met at each other's houses. One time we did this thing on what you like best about Pahrump and what you don't like best about Pahrump. Everybody had on the top of the list, "people." The people were so nice. And the bad was "wind." It was terribly windy.

But we had a wonderful group of people. They cared about each other and helped each other. I don't think we would have ever made it if it hadn't been for friends. If you had a problem, you could depend on a friend. We were like a family. People say we have a clique. Well, we don't have a clique, we have a family. We're all getting old but we're still a family.

RM: So you're still in touch with those original women?

PM: Not as much, but certainly I know they are there. I know that I can call them.

RM: And you feel that kindred spirit with them. That doesn't exist hardly at all now, does it, especially in the city?

PM: It doesn't exist so much here as it did because we used to see each other all the time and now we don't. But it doesn't matter; we're still family.

RM: What was the basis of that bonding or that closeness?

PM: I think a need for companionship. You didn't have any television—it was just snow—and you could barely hear the radio. You had yourself and your friends and that was about it so you had to make some kind of a social life.

RM: Did you see your friends a lot at that time?

PM: Probably a lot more than I do now, yes. We played cards together and we used to have a dance once a week at the community center. The community center was not the community center as it is now, but the one at the Manse School. There was a building out back that they use for storage, I think, now. We bought that and moved it out there and then we started having dances and we bobbed for apples and all kinds of things at these socials that we would have. We had a social once a week and we had some people who could play the guitar and the violin. Dutch Turner and her brother Ben and all these people would play. The kids would come and there'd be dancing and movies.

RM: Were you showing Hollywood movies?

PM: We'd rent the movies from town and bring them out and show them.

RM: And did you charge?

PM: I don't remember. If we did, it wasn't much.

RM: People didn't have much, did they?

PM: No, we didn't have much.

RM: What else do you recall?

PM: That the community was important enough that when we moved to Sacramento for Bill to work (we stayed there one summer and he worked as an iron worker), we'd drive back once a month to go to a social.

RM: That's a real testimony, isn't it?

PM: Well, it was very nice. You wanted to see your friends.

RM: Who were your friends?

PM: Frank and Carol Woner, Bob and Jacque Ruud, Tim and Jackie Hafen, and Ron and Charlotte Floyd. And Joyce and Hollis Harris and later on, the Wulfensteins. And Joe and Shirley Hallagers were there for a long time. They had the bar down here for a long time. We didn't go out because we all had kids, but my window faced the bar. We'd bring our kids to my house and

then since the window from the bar faced this place we'd look down here and watch them. [Laughter] That's how we watched after our kids if we had a social down there. I'll bet the kids could tell you quite a story.

It was a great place to raise children. We were working on the corner, of course, because we had our business down there. I was working all day and my husband was working all day and the kids were just kind of helping.

When Roy, my son, was about 10 or 11, and they used to have horses (we had five horses). They'd get on a horse in the morning and put my little girl, Teresa, behind Cathy so the two of them would ride one horse and Roy would ride his and there'd be the Bolling kids and the Ruud kids. They'd all get together on a Saturday morning and go off up into the mountains with a skillet and some bacon and eggs, and cook. They had a great freedom that you don't have any more. They'd go all over the country. And they'd get on their bikes and ride down all the way to Jim's bar and come back. Usually that was the Bolling kids and my kids.

RM: How far would that be?

PM: Probably four miles each way. And Roy started delivering the Sun newspaper here. He was 11 that year and he used to deliver it on his horse. He had, I think, 14 customers or something like that and they were all around here and he would deliver the paper on his horse.

RM: That is a great story. Do you have any more anecdotes about childhood?

PM: Well, Cathy fell and cut her hand.

RM: Why don't you give me your children's names and their birth dates?

PM: Cathryn is Cathryn Motyka now and her birthday was March 20, 1956. And Roy is Roy Mankins and his was 1953; Teresa Moran was born in 1962.

Anyway, when Cathy cut her hand, it was lying open like so, so we of course put her in the car to run her to town (Las Vegas) to have it taken care of. When we get in there he said, "What do you want me to do with it? It's been open for an hour and a half. [Laughter] That was the kind of medical care we had. We had nobody here. There was just nothing. We had EMTs, though. I don't remember when they came in but they were very efficient. We thought they were the best in the state. Of course, our cars could all make it faster than the ambulances.

RM: Oh, really. The ambulance was pretty beat up?

PM: They were old. We didn't have much of anything.

RM: Did the healthcare situation here cause you a lot of anxiety?

PM: Only when I was pregnant. We went to town three times when I was pregnant because I thought I was going to have the baby and finally we stayed in there a week until she did come along. One time when the Moores were here, we got in the car with Beverly. She was going to

have a baby and she'd had her first in 25 minutes so we loaded up with scissors and diapers and all that. Well, she didn't have it; we had to wait. But several people did have their children on the way.

RM: And some people moved into town when they were about due, didn't they?

PM: Yes, they did.

RM: Did you have general anxiety about the kids? If they'd fall down. . . .

PM: I had a very good doctor. I used to call him on the phone. We had one phone right out in front of the service station, a payphone. Most of the time it didn't work but sometimes it did. I'd go out and call him and he'd tell me what to do. That's how I got to be Dr. Mom. Now my kids all call me, "What do I do?" We were an hour away but we were an hour away for so many years that we got used to it.

RM: I think probably people now would feel a little tense about being that far from medical care.

PM: We were at an auction for the ambulance crew one time down at the community center. My granddaughter is 35 now and she was probably ten, maybe a little bit less, and she was out sliding on the slide and she fell off and broke both arms. Well, it just so happened that we had Dr. Batdorf inside the building, so he came out and she was in the ambulance and he took care of her right there and wrapped her all up and puts her arms together like this. That's the way she had to be until we went down to see him on the next Monday.

RM: So he crossed them in front of her.

PM: She had both arms broken. That's quite a problem. [Chuckles]

RM: I had one broken arm and I know how that goes. Talk about the evolution of the groups in town and the services and so on.

PM: The EMTs were very, very efficient. Len Lafoon ran that group for a long time. He then quit and went to Lake Tahoe and he got a divorce and all that so he wasn't there anymore so it became a political football more or less. It's still good, I'm sure, but it was great when he was here. I don't feel that it's as great as it used to be even though they have much more money, more training, more everything. They don't seem to have the control that they used to have.

RM: And when did the EMT service first come in?

PM: It must have been about '63 or so. I know we had power by then.

RM: Were the EMTs full-time or part-time?

PM: No, they were all volunteers.

RM: And was the EMT associated with the fire department?

PM: They might have been associated, but it was a very loose association because Len managed his own show. We didn't have much of a fire department at that point. My store caught on fire in about '65 or '66 and we were down here. I was looking out the window and I saw smoke coming out. I said, "Bill, get up. There's smoke coming out." So we got down there and we had no fire department then. Larry Bolling brought his water truck that he watered down his fields with and put the fire out. That's what kind of a fire department we had.

RM: When did you get a real volunteer fire department?

PM: I went on the town board in '79 and they had one then but I don't think they'd had it very long; I can't remember. I know that they were a great part of our budget so I guess they'd been there a while. They had old, beat-up equipment.

I remember that we didn't have a place to put our dead bodies. People would die—and they did die, of course—and we had to do something about it. So we took an old EMT truck, the cab-over thing, like a SUV, and that was our coroner's vehicle. Before that, we had stored them in the storage room at the community center, in that center room where we store the furniture now. One day one of the guys who was working came in and opened the door and there's a dead body and he didn't know we put them there and he almost fainted. So we had to quit using that.

RM: Then what did you do?

PM: After we got in trouble over that storage room, we put them in this vehicle and they'd stay overnight until the next day.

RM: Did many people die here?

PM: According to the population, probably as many as normally would. I can remember five or six dying at least that we had to take care of and maybe more.

RM: You mentioned that you went onto the town board. What was your thinking in running for the town board?

PM: Actually, I didn't want to run for the town board. Bob Ruud and a friend of his came to me and said, "It's your turn."

I said, "Well, I'm not running for anything."

They said, "You don't have to run. Just come down and we'll put you in." So I went down there and got on the town board.

RM: Describe what went on there.

PM: I think it was wonderful, if you want to know the truth. I think that was government at the closest to the people you can have. We had five on the board and three of them had jobs and one of them played golf all day every day. When I'd have a problem, I'd run the thing because I was the only one at home. Or I'd run down to the golf course and pick up Charlie Sumpter and we'd take care of it. [Chuckles]

RM: So you were the government, so to speak.

PM: Yes. And Bob Huffman was on it for a while (he had Saddle West). It was interesting and it was fun. There were a lot of problems. When the dump would catch on fire, you wouldn't know what to do. Finally I got so I'd call Ray Wulfenstein and he'd go up and put the dump fire out. It was very grassroots. We had very little to work with. I can remember one time we needed some shovels and hoes. We had to go to the county commissioner and wait a month to get, like, three shovels and a hoe. Every dime we had came through them. We had no budget of our own.

RM: How long were you on the town board?

PM: Until I went to the Nye County Commission in 1985.

RM: Describe your decision to run for a county commissioner's seat.

PM: Bob Ruud had been on the commission and he died and Jacque took over. Jacque didn't want to do it anymore and I was the next logical one to go.

RM: What did you think about becoming a commissioner?

PM: I liked doing town board a whole lot better. There's too much politics at the county level. At the town level, it wasn't so political. At the county level, when you had three . . . and believe me, I was pretty much responsible for getting five commissioners.

As a town board member I pretty much went along with whatever I thought needed to be done because there was just one way to do things because that's all we had money for. When I got to the county commission, there was a lot of money and people had different ideas on how they wanted to spend it and where they wanted to spend it. They accused me of being parochial and I think they probably were right. We had done without so much here in Pahrump for so long and by that time we were pretty big; we had a lot of people, probably three times as many as Tonopah at that point.

RM: What would you say the population was when you went in?

PM: There must have been about 10,000, something like that. And we needed so much. Our roads were almost all gravel and they had a hospital in Tonopah and we had no medical care. I felt like we needed to catch up. I had difficulty with that and I felt like it was more work than I wanted to put into it so when my term was up I didn't run again. Then I ran for state senate and didn't win because I ran against Virgil Getto and he'd been in 22 years. Then I went on the hospital board and I worked in Pahrump.

RM: Describe some more about your tenure as a commissioner and what kinds of issues you dealt with.

PM: I think we did some very good things. For instance, we were all our own area's road commissioner, so instead of having someone else make the decisions, the commissioners themselves would know what was going on in their community and they would make those decisions based on what they saw as the need at the time.

As far as health services were concerned, there wasn't much to do except try to control Nye General. And that was difficult. They would go so far into the hole it was like a bottomless pit, and there was nothing you could do about it. It just kept going downhill. There were a lot of things like that that you had to deal with.

I really, really liked the people I served with even though I did not agree with them on many of the issues. I served with Bob Revert, who I consider a very community-minded person, the best thing that ever happened to Beatty—he really was the best thing that ever happened to Beatty. He wasn't that good for Pahrump but he was good for Beatty. And Joe Garcia was very sincere in what he had to do.

RM: Those were the two commissioners that you served with, right? And then you kind of tossed in the towel when it came time for re-election.

PM: That's true. If you can't make a difference, don't bother. Barbara Raper decided that she would run so I took her around and introduced her to all the people in the county that I knew and she ran and won.

RM: Did you run countywide or by district?

PM: We ran countywide. But that was not fair and the reason it's not fair is because the people don't know you in the other communities. They're either voting for a name that they've seen or heard or a number that they've heard. Richard Carver thought I really made a mistake when I made it so each commissioner had to run from their own community but I think he was wrong. I think running from your own community is much better. My feeling is, if you don't know who they are, don't vote at all. Let somebody who does know them, vote.

Anyway, politics is a strange thing. I really loved it; don't get me wrong. I feel like politics is part of everyday life—it's how you deal with other people. I have no problems with politicians per se; I think they all mean to be good. Somehow it doesn't work that way but that's what they

mean to be. There are a lot of really nice people that I met while I was in politics that I really treasured.

RM: Talk about the hospital board now, because that's important to Pahrump.

PM: That was a very difficult job. We passed a bond issue to cover the building but we didn't do a thing to cover the operation. Well, the operation wouldn't pay for itself—it was going about \$300,000 a year in the hole. A lot more than that was being spent on Nye General so I felt that they should help support us because we had a larger population and they should at least pick up indigent care and the sheriff's problems. They wouldn't pick up either one. As a result, we kept going down, down, down. It was a very difficult job.

RM: When did the medical center start here?

PM: I think we opened in 1994. We meant to build a hospital but the idea was to start with a medical center and enlarge. We had six beds when we started. Well, we didn't have a use permit. We had to lease it out because we couldn't afford to run it. When we turned it over to other people, they took the beds out and then we didn't even have the ability to call ourselves a hospital. We kept going downhill until finally it was just impossible. When you don't have community support, you just can't do it. We really saved a lot of lives; it was a good thing. But I couldn't convince anybody it was important enough to support it.

RM: The bond issue—was that a bond issue for Pahrump or was it a county issue?

PM: No, it was Pahrump.

RM: So you were funding your own project?

PM: Yes, but all we funded was the building. We just didn't have enough money to run it without the funds.

RM: I see. So what was the outcome? Where does it stand today?

PM: I don't really know exactly. I know that they dissolved the hospital board. The county took it over and then they had it closed for a long time because Dr. Tannoury had filed a lawsuit. He'd wanted it and somebody else got it. He filed suit against it and it was closed for about three years and then it was leased to Advanced Health. I don't know what they leased it for but I know that it's not much. But it's operating and the county is not paying for it and it's a really good thing.

RM: So you have seen the long-term healthcare picture here, both from calling the doctor on the payphone and having EMTs.

PM: I always thought we needed a hospital really badly and I felt that if you really needed something badly you ought to be willing to pay a little bit for it. Some people don't feel that way.

RM: Right. What is Pahrump's population now? It must be close to 40,000, isn't it? That's a lot of people.

PM: It is. Anyway, the new hospital we have now probably is not as big as it's going to be.

RM: When was it built?

PM: About three years ago. The people who were renting our medical center, Rural Health Consortium, are the ones that built the hospital and they're the ones that are running it.

RM: In terms of your political career, what are you most proud of?

PM: Gee, I don't know. Maybe being honest. [Laughter] I think we've accomplished quite a bit but I'm not sure that any of it can really be attributed to me. I just kind of worked with everybody else.

I'm proud of actually participating in the development of this valley. I'm proud of being a pioneer and I'm proud of sticking it out, which was not easy. [Chuckles] I think probably that is the most important thing I've managed to do is to help with every development along the way. I was on the park and recreation board for a while and we put in several parks and I was very active in doing that. I was active on the hospital board and I've been active in getting job training, getting people jobs.

RM: So you've been very, very active.

PM: Yes, I have. But I haven't done much in the last ten years—actually, less than that. My husband died seven and a half years ago and I was on the hospital board then but I quit right after that.

RM: Has there been any disappointments in your political activities?

PM: Oh, I've lost quite a few. [Laughter] I started by losing the senate race and then I ran for the assessor's office and I lost that one. Then I decided I wanted to be a commissioner again and I ran for that and lost that one to Red Copass.

RM: In terms of what you tried to do, have there been disappointments?

PM: I wouldn't say disappointments exactly. I think most of the things I've tried to do I've pretty much achieved. And if I haven't, I was perfectly happy to lose it.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Back when Bill was working at the Test Site and you were teaching, how was the transition you made to the store?

PM: Mary and Leroy Vaughn had the store in the corner of 372 and 160, where Bank of America is, and it was a little restaurant and service station. We had known them for a long time. We bought it from them because they wanted to move to Las Vegas. For a long time I would go to school and teach and come home and run the business and Bill was going to Mercury. That went on till 1962, when we decided that we either had to run it or quit doing it because we were just pouring money down a rat hole.

RM: When did you buy it?

PM: In '61, I think. I don't remember what we paid for it.

RM: And what did it consist of when you bought it?

PM: It was an old service station with a very old building for the restaurant.

RM: How many pumps were there?

PM: Two, ethyl and regular. We ran the store and the station for a long time and then when Valley Electric was coming in, we put in a mobile home park with eight spaces so the workers could stay there.

RM: Oh, on the property? How many acres was it?

PM: An acre and a quarter. We didn't own the acre and a quarter; Reverts from Beatty owned it and they had leased it to Walt Williams, who leased it to us. We tried to buy it but we couldn't so in '73 we left that corner and moved down to across from Saddle West.

RM: Had that station on the corner originally been the Reverts'? Did they have a station down here? It was that one. But it wasn't run by them. Leroy leased it from the Reverts and we bought the lease from him; all the time we were in business we were paying rent to the Reverts.

RM: How many gallons of gas a day would you sell?

PM: We used to think we had to sell 1,000.

RM: You would sell 1,000 a day?

PM: Well, sometimes we'd sell 200, sometimes we'd sell 12.

RM: But you would kind of average 1,000?

PM: Probably not when we first started. There wasn't much business; it was just pretty bad. We started supplying farmers with a truck and then we started running oil in big trucks. We ran 18-wheelers for probably about six years, delivering both fuel products and oil from the wholesaler. We bought from Texaco and Gulf Oil and delivered to Utah, California, Nevada, and Arizona.

RM: You were buying in Los Angeles and delivering it to four states? That was a big operation.

PM: It was. That's where we made money.

RM: Talk about managing that and how that evolved.

PM: We had a Texaco distributorship and we could buy at a decent price; we could buy better than they could in other places. The guy who was our representative from Texaco came and told us how we could do this and he showed us how to do it and we did it.

They paid you for delivery and we'd buy it and deliver it where it needed to go. A lot of it went to Utah, to Salt Lake and a town between Provo and Salt Lake. And part of it was Ogden; there was quite a bit up there.

RM: Did you own the trucks?

PM: Yes.

RM: So it was a big operation.

PM: Well, not too big. We had two big trucks but they were on the road a lot.

RM: Did Bill ever drive the trucks?

PM: Yes, he did. And so did Roy; he was 18 when he started driving.

RM: And Roy is. . . ?

PM: He's an Allstate agent now.

RM: When did you start that delivering to four states?

PM: Roy was about 15 or 16 so, it would have to be about '69 or '70.

RM: Were you still in the gas station on the corner up here when you were doing that?

PM: Yes. We had the gas station leased at that point.

RM: Was it successful, leasing it?

PM: You never make money at a gas station; you make money on labor and things like that. If you're making even 10 cents a gallon, and you're selling 1,000 gallons a day, you've made \$100. Big deal; it costs you more than that for labor. So we put in the grocery store to go with it and that made a little money and then we started hauling oil and that made money. Then we sold cars and that made money. Just whatever came along.

RM: So you were really innovative entrepreneurs.

PM: You had to be in this town. Nobody had much business of any kind so you had to have several different kinds of businesses. It was true of everybody who had a business, and there weren't many. There was the trading post, and us, and Ronny Floyd put in a hardware store down here on West Street.

RM: What did the building at your station consist of?

PM: If you want to see it, it's down on Manse Road. They moved it down there and rebuilt it completely.

RM: Is it a gas station?

PM: No, it's the building with the pumps and all the signs and the hoist; it's a historical display. Wayne Mapes is on the Historical Society and he also collects all of this stuff so Roy gave him the building; he went down there and put it up. It's not operational but it's kind of neat.

RM: What did you sell in the building?

PM: Just the same things you sell in all gas stations, oil and so forth. We had a convenience store behind it; we built it in '65.

RM: And you said that there was originally a restaurant associated with it. Was that the convenience store, too?

PM: No, that was separate. That's the little building over here and the store was over here.

RM: And what did the restaurant consist of?

PM: It had about four booths and maybe ten stools. We fed all the old people around here who didn't have a home—breakfast, lunch and dinner. Lou Hathaway and Lou Harrington were two of the guys who had the farm down there and they used to be there every day. My

daughter was four at the time and I was working. In the morning I'd get up and go out at 6:00 and serve them breakfast and she'd come out to get ready for school and they'd brush her hair, fix it all up. Like I say, we were all family.

RM: Yes indeed. And what were you serving in the restaurant?

PM: We had one entrée, usually, for lunch and one for dinner. And they either wanted that or they wanted a sandwich. We served good food, like roast beef and turkey and fried chicken—all that. I had a really good cook but Hattie Ford was a better cook. She baked pies. She cooked in her daughter's place. Her daughter was Mary Vaughn. She cooked for her and she could make wonderful pies. But when I bought it, she wouldn't work anymore; she quit. I really missed her pies. They were terrific.

RM: Did you do any of the cooking?

PM: Part of the time.

RM: How many dinners were you serving a day?

PM: I don't know. We had people who came all the time but it wasn't a lot.

RM: Did it make money?

PM: No. [Laughter] A restaurant never makes money. When Ronny and Charlotte bought the Saddle West, I said, "That is really the dumbest move you'll ever make. Not only do you have to watch your money in the gaming casino, but you have to watch your money in the restaurant." And you lose a lot of money that way—usually from behind the counter, not in front of it.

RM: You mean, people walk off without paying their bill?

PM: No, the people behind the counter take it home. I think you'd find that probably true everywhere. They have to keep an eye on the employees.

RM: So there was a learning curve in those businesses, wasn't there?

PM: Yes, there was.

RM: Is the restaurant still there?

PM: No, it's gone.

RM: How big was it?

PM: It was probably 25 x 35; not very big at all. It was divided right down the middle with cooking in the back and stuff in the front.

RM: And where did you get your supplies?

PM: I had to go get them in Las Vegas. I'd usually go twice or three times a week.

RM: What was your restaurant called?

PM: I think it was Pahrump Café. I can't remember.

RM: And what were your hours?

PM: From early to late. [Laughter] We usually cleaned up about 10:00, 10:30 at night and it opened at 6:00 so you had to have everything going by 6:00.

RM: Oh, my goodness. Did you get many people passing through?

PM: What we got mostly in those days was people who serviced the farmers; they'd come out and stop and eat, people from the tractor companies and things like that. Because farmers were our biggest thing.

RM: Did you have trouble keeping help for the restaurant?

PM: I don't remember it being so much trouble keeping help but you couldn't find good help. There weren't many jobs so you didn't really have that much trouble getting somebody. I had a really good friend who was a very good cook and she worked for me for a very long time. Her name was Beulah McCowan. She's gone now. And Laura Fonsbeck ran it for a while and she was a very good cook.

RM: What did you carry at the convenience store?

PM: We carried meats like pork chops and steaks and chickens, but they were mostly all prepackaged frozen. And we had all the canned goods. We had vegetables but not a lot, just a very few. We had liquor, too.

RM: Oh, really? So you had to have a liquor license.

PM: Yes, you had to get that from the county. We had a liquor license for years.

RM: Where you the only store in Pahrump at the time?

PM: No, they had the Trading Post.

RM: You were very enterprising, weren't you?

PM: Well, you had to be to make a living.

RM: And meanwhile, your husband had quit the Test Site. What was his thinking in doing that?

PM: He either had to do one thing or the other and he had to give it a try to see if we could make it on our own.

RM: And you said you already had the gas station?

PM: Yes, we had that for two years before he quit.

RM: And you were running that while he was working and you were teaching. In the meanwhile you had your land down here, didn't you?

PM: By that time we weren't doing anything with it.

RM: How did you juggle all those balls?

PM: Not very well, probably. It used to bother me really a lot that we couldn't farm. So one day after we'd moved up to the corner I took my kids and we went down there. We'd moved the house up to the corner and left all this stuff down there. We went down there and I was sitting there feeling really bad. I was upset and crying because we had been so unsuccessful at farming. I took a match out and set fire to it and burned it all down. The kids just had a fit. I said, "Well, I'll never have to sit here and worry about it again." [Laughs]

RM: How long did you live in that house from Boulder City?

PM: Probably about three years. Then we moved it up to the corner and lived there about three years with the business. We moved out here when we bought this house. We had this house moved out here. Just half of it—this half. We added that half.

RM: Then you moved down to where you are now, on Fifth Street. What prompted you to move down here?

PM: I had another baby and there wasn't room in that house so we had to have a bigger house.

RM: So all of you were living in that little two-bedroom house. Before you moved down here did you add any to the house on the corner?

PM: No.

RM: But when you moved, you were still not too far from the station.

PM: No, you could see it—there was nothing between us and it then. I could take binoculars and watch what was going on. [Laughter]

RM: So you were working the restaurant, the store, and the gas station and then you went into the oil distributing business as well?

PM: When we went into that, we pretty much had closed the restaurant; it was pretty much a full-time job. We still had the store and the station.

RM: What was your thinking in closing the restaurant?

PM: It wasn't making any money. Eventually you have to quit.

RM: Is it fair to say that you had the first restaurant in Pahrump ever?

PM: No, because the trading post, even though they didn't have a restaurant per se, would make you a sandwich and you'd sit around this pot-bellied stove and eat it. So they had what you could call a restaurant.

RM: So you had the first real restaurant where a person could come in and sit down and place an order.

PM: Of course, Mary and Leroy had started it. They were there first.

RM: When did they open that?

PM: It must have been the year my daughter was born—1955, something like that.

RM: And the gas station was there already. Do you remember when it opened?

PM: It must have been right at the same time.

RM: And it had been the Reverts'?

PM: I think Tidewater Oil and Leroy and Mary opened it; the Reverts had the land and they leased it from them.

RM: And that was the first gas station in Pahrump? They didn't sell gas at the trading post?

PM: I don't think so but I can't remember. But where would people have gotten gas? Maybe they had a pump and I don't remember.

RM: I don't think Pop Buol sold gas, did he?

PM: Pop Buol's place was just before our time.

RM: Did you know Pop Buol?

PM: I remember Doby Doc but not Pop Buol very much. Doby was quite a character.

RM: Tell me all about him.

PM: Oh, I couldn't tell you all about Doby, nobody could. [Laughter] He was a kick. I'd be teaching school and the kids would go to the store and he'd give them a nickel if they were good; he'd give them a penny if they weren't. [Laughter] They all thought he was wonderful because a nickel would buy something in those days.

RM: How would he know they were being good?

PM: Oh, he'd asked them. [Laughter] He was a kick. He always wore these old overalls. We had the grand opening for the power company—I particularly remember that. It was so funny because he came and he had on a suit with a big diamond stick pin and his overalls on top of them. That was Doby.

Another story that I always thought was really interesting—he came over to Larry and Betty Bolling one day. They were living across from him in a mobile home and they were friends. He had this sack of stuff and he said, "I want you to take care of this for me while I'm gone." They threw it under the bed and when he came back they learned it was full of money. [Laughter]

RM: They were so honest they didn't even look.

PM: Doby built that bomb shelter down there during the time when we were all scared of everything. It ended up as his wine cellar and he'd take the kids down and show it to them.

RM: What do you recall about nuclear testing?

PM: I don't recall ever being really afraid of it. It never occurred to us that it was any danger to us; it was something interesting. It was like fireworks. We knew when the shots were going to go off so everybody'd go out and sit on the cars and watch for it. We could see them from the corner.

RM: You'd see the flash? Did you ever see the cloud?

PM: I don't recall seeing the cloud.

RM: How did the other people feel?

PM: The same way I did, I think. Nobody was particularly upset about it. Of course, we never had much of a problem here from it because we're not downwind.

RM: That's right. And it also probably helped that people were earning a living at the Test Site. Talk about the effect that the Test Site had on Pahrump in the years that you were here.

PM: At first there were only a few people from here working out there; I think most of our people were farmers or farm laborers. At the Test Site they used to tell Bill he was the mayor of Pahrump because he was the only one they knew who was from here. There were maybe five or so but they didn't share rides so it wasn't that they were close or anything. But then when I was on the town board there were so many that we put in places for them to park so they could park and ride—the one down by the VFW hall and the one down below the town office.

RM: Maybe one of the things that limited the amount of workers when you first came here was that it was a dirt road over to Mercury.

PM: You had to figure on at least one flat tire a month. It was terrible.

RM: Then when they paved that road, that opened it up for workers.

PM: Yes, it did. And they didn't have buses for a long, long time. They had to share rides and there was a lot of that.

RM: Would you say that people in the community were supportive of the Test Site?

PM: Yes. I think they still are.

RM: I would think that, too. Talk a little bit about Yucca Mountain. What did you think when you first heard about Yucca Mountain? Because you were in politics then.

PM: That's true, and I've been through that thing. I was more worried about the high-level waste site out at Beatty because when I was sitting on the board, we had a leak and we couldn't determine how far it went or what it was. There were fissures there that went down toward Amargosa Valley, as far as I can remember. I would be more worried about that than I would Yucca Mountain simply because I went through Yucca Mountain and I saw what they were doing and it looked to me like it was far enough down.

They're burying the waste all over the country right now and there's already at least one truck a day on our roads for the Beatty site, so I don't see where it's that bad. Steve Bradhurst used to tell us that we had to say we were interested because that way we'd get more out of it and he was probably right. But we've held it up for an awful long time. If it's dangerous . . . I don't think it is, but anything is dangerous if not done properly.

RM: And I'm not sure what we're getting. Nevada has not received a whole lot of benefit from Yucca Mountain.

PM: That's true. But part of it's our own fault.

RM: Yes, our political leaders. Do you see the political leadership as the main problem with the whole thing?

PM: I would say that politics has a lot to do with it and a lot of it is money.

RM: Yes, but Nevada could have gotten a lot of money for Yucca Mountain.

PM: They still do get money for Yucca Mountain.

RM: I mean, they could have cashed in.

PM: I don't understand it. When you fly over Nevada it looks like they forgot to take care of it. [Laughter] Now, I love the valley. Don't get me wrong. I've lived here all my adult life and I love it. But there are some things that I really just don't quite understand. Why should we be so against Yucca Mountain when it's got so much potential for taking care of a big problem that the United States has? In France, they dump it over a cliff. It doesn't seem to bother them any.

RM: There are other countries that are solving the nuclear byproducts problem better, and here we are with our heads in the sand.

PM: Have you ever been to Carlsbad? It's an interesting, interesting experience to see what they're doing to those salt caverns.

RM: And the town of Carlsbad loves it.

PM: Yes, they do. And I can't see a thing wrong with it. We walked right into it. It shrinks so much a year so I guess eventually it's going to close itself off.

RM: I think it's been politics in Nevada rather than dealing with it rationally.

PM: I think it's been politics from the county level all the way up. Actually, the man on the street only knows what he's told from the newspaper or the radio or the television or whatever so he's against it because he doesn't understand it.

RM: That's right. And you were in political office right around the time when the Yucca Mountain repository was proposed. My sense is that Nevadans were not really that against it when it was first proposed.

PM: That's politicians' work.

RM: They milked it.

PM: You got that right, and we went along with it. I'm sorry, but that's what we did. We were told to do such-and-such and we did it.

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Now, there's another major area in your life we haven't discussed, and that's the whole subdivision topic. You subdivided your land? Tell me about how you got into that and what that involved and your perspective of it now.

PM: I think we were smart not to farm. [Laughs] We didn't know how. So in about 1977, we decided to go ahead and subdivide it and we subdivided it in acre-and-a-quarter parcels.

RM: Your whole 320 acres?

PM: Yes. And it made a good life for the rest of our lives. Forty of it we didn't subdivide. We sold 40 of it to somebody and used the money from it to subdivide the rest of it.

RM: What did they use the 40 for, do you know?

PM: It's still sitting down there empty. It's not even subdivided. The guy died and I don't know who owns it now.

RM: Can you remember what you sold the 40 for?

PM: I think \$40,000.

RM: And that would have been in '76?

PM: Something like that.

RM: And it's still sitting there?

PM: Yes.

RM: And what made you decide to do it at that time? I mean, you'd had it for quite a few years.

PM: I don't know what made it particularly interesting then.

RM: Was Pahrump getting ready to start blossoming then?

PM: I don't think so. We didn't really start selling until in the '80s. We had it subdivided but it didn't sell for a long time.

RM: Tell me about the steps involved in doing a subdivision.

PM: First you have to have so much water and you have to turn that back into the state for each lot that you sell. Then you had to have somebody come out and survey it and stake it off. At that time we didn't have a planning board.

RM: So it wasn't such a challenging thing for you and Bill to have to go through.

PM: No, it wasn't.

RM: What would the taxes be on those vacant 40 acres, I wonder. Just fallow land sitting there.

PM: I have no idea. It's about \$300 for an acre and a quarter. I still have four lots—grandchildren lots. [Laughs]

RM: Oh, that's nice. So originally, your lots just sat there for a while.

PM: Yes, for a long time. Nobody was moving to Pahrump. It wouldn't have done any good to try and sell it so you just didn't even try.

RM: But you didn't have a lot of cash out of pocket in it so it wasn't that tough. What triggered the sales?

PM: People who worked at Mercury started moving to Pahrump and that began to start the sales and once they started, it just kept going. It took a long time to sell it all, probably ten or 15 years.

RM: When you first started out, what was an acre and a quarter selling for?

PM: About \$1,500, something like that. They made money on their purchase, didn't they? [Laughter]

RM: So you were still selling into the '80s. Did you sell it yourselves or did you have a realtor?

PM: We always used realtors. Rita Lamonte sold a lot of it. She's still in business, I think.

RM: And how did she get her customers?

PM: If I knew, I'd tell my daughter. She's a realtor today and she needs some customers. [Laughs]

RM: Did you sell the lots on terms?

PM: Yes, most of it—10 percent down at 10 percent interest.

RM: And for how long did you carry the paper?

PM: Ten years.

RM: So pretty soon you have these checks coming in every month.

PM: That's true. We had a lot of interest.

RM: What is the status of those lots now?

PM: They're almost all paid off; I think maybe we have two that are still coming in.

RM: And have people built on them?

PM: Almost all of them are built on and most everybody that bought from us is still there.

RM: So there's a whole community down there. What do you think when you see it all built up?

PM: It doesn't bother me at all. I've just seen it grow up. It's just like everybody else's. Sometimes I wish I had built a housing division there instead of just selling lots individually because they put mobile homes and things on them, but that's their business.

RM: And each lot comes with water?

PM: Yes. We didn't drill wells but they had the water rights.

RM: Were there other people subdividing at the same time you were?

PM: Oh, absolutely; there was a lot of subdividing at that point. The McCowan place got subdivided and Hafen subdivided the Manse Ranch and Hollis was subdividing—that's when he did three subdivisions.

RM: And everybody came out pretty well on it, didn't they?

PM: I'm sure they didn't lose.

RM: And people began subdividing when it wasn't obvious that things were really going to pop.

PM: No, it wasn't obvious. And we waited a long time to get all the sales; like I said, it took a long time to sell it all.

RM: Because you started selling when cotton was still being grown and it wasn't obvious that the cotton was going to come to an end.

PM: Were you ever here while there was a lot of cotton being grown?

RM: No.

PM: It was so beautiful. We used to stand up at our service station and look out over the Pahrump Ranch and it was so green and beautiful and we knew it had been subdivided and that it would never look like that again. We were so rural and we were so close as a people that when the subdivision came in and Preferred Equities did all this big subdivision, it wiped out a lot of things that we had had before even though the development built our valley.

RM: Would you say that Preferred Equities was a turning point in the valley and kind of gave it a critical mass?

PM: That's true, it did. I think probably Pahrump would not be what it is today if it hadn't been for Preferred Equities. They came in here and started subdividing. They really did not have as much money as people think because we were selling them gas and were into us for something like \$5,000. We were trying to collect it and they sent a woman up from Beverly Hills and she said we hadn't billed them right, etc., etc. They used every excuse in the world to not pay the bill so we cut them off. And they said, "You can't do that. You're just a little business and we're big. You'll go bankrupt without us."

I said, "Then we'll go with money." So they came back and paid their bill and from then on we didn't have much trouble with them. But they did not have money when they started. They put a face on Pahrump that I wouldn't have done in the way that they laid it out.

RM: In what way?

PM: Oh, some of the streets that are dead end and circled. And where they have acre-and-a-quarter lots down behind the old Manse Ranch, down off of Homestead where that dirt settles really badly. It's very hard to build on it because, you know, it just really goes. There were things that I didn't particularly agree with but I do agree with the fact that Preferred Equities built the Pahrump Valley.

RM: What do you think would have happened to the Pahrump Valley if they hadn't come in?

PM: I think we'd be a Beatty. I think that we would have been okay because the people who lived here would still be able to do what they were doing but we would not have all the different people from all the different states and be the kind of a place we are today.

RM: But you were creating subdivisions before they came in.

PM: Yes, but we weren't selling before they came in. We didn't start selling till after '77; they came in '69. One thing they did that I didn't particularly like is the 40-year restrictions that they put on these lots. There was no way to appeal those restrictions and I'm not sure there is now.

That's one of the reasons I wanted a planning department formed—because with a planning department, you can take a change of use to them and they can override the restrictions. The way it was before, if it said it was single-family housing, that's what it was and then there was no way to appeal it—they zoned it themselves.

RM: And you feel that that should have been more through the county or through a Pahrump planning board.

PM: My husband was on the Pahrump Planning Board for 17 years but they really didn't have any authority; they were just an advisory council, much like they are today. Preferred put things into Pahrump that will always be here that maybe they didn't have the right to do.

RM: Like what?

PM: Like 9-B. That's a subdivision of 300 and some acres down on Gamebird. There are about 360 acres there that have no water. It's been subdivided but no water has been allocated to it. It's just sitting there.

RM: What is its future?

PM: I don't really know. I know that Utilities Inc. is trying to figure out some way to pay for it. But if they pay for it, we're going to pay for it. There are things like that in this town that wouldn't have happened with a little bit better planning.

RM: So Pahrump maybe grew a little bit helter skelter.

PM: I think Preferred had their own ideas and mostly their ideas were based on what was good for their company, which is normal. Over all, they did a pretty good job but there are some things that needed to be changed and that's why we needed a planning board.

RM: Does Preferred Equities still exist?

PM: They're gone.

RM: So the land is all owned by other people.

PM: That's true, but all the restrictions are still there.

RM: Can they be over-written?

PM: The county can do it but I don't see that happening because the 40 years are almost up.

RM: How do you feel about incorporation?

PM: I've always been for incorporation. I'm the one who got it to where we were a town and had a right to have a town government. That was because we were having so much trouble because of the distance between here and Tonopah. It was too far to go to attend every meeting and take care of things, so we got a town board-type of government, which everybody advised against, but it was better than nothing. So it worked as far as that was concerned.

But we don't share in much of the monies that come into the county on a per capita basis. Nye County has been very fair; in fact, we have a courthouse and all the things that we need here. But if we were incorporated, we'd have the ability to do more than we are able to do. I don't think it would raise our taxes, but most people say, "Yes, it would raise our taxes. Therefore, I don't want it." Well, you get what you pay for. I've always felt like I pay as much taxes as anybody and I'd rather pay a little more and have a little more.

RM: That reminds me—were the taxes on the land before you subdivided, and after you sold it, a burden?

PM: It didn't used to be very much but filing them now would be a lot. They're really high now but they weren't then. But we were making pretty good money so I didn't notice it being too bad.

RM: Talk about how you got the town board here.

PM: I certainly politicized it as much as possible. I made sure that everybody understood that we had to have some kind of local government. As a town board, we'd meet and make all these decisions, take them to the county, and they'd override them or not override them according to whether they felt like it or not. It was very difficult—everything that had to be done had to be okayed through the county. Emerson Titlow, out of Tonopah, started the town board form of government. He's the one who put the law in the state when he was a state senator.

Nobody had ever done it before, but we sold the idea to the people and they voted for it and we put it in. That gave us the ability to spend our tax money here. We didn't get much; we had about \$250,000 a year to take care of everything we had to take care of. But at least we could spend that money here. It was an important law but we certainly outlived it.

RM: And what year did you put that in?

PM: It was while I was still on the town board and I was on from '79 to '85, so it must have been about '82 or '83. I was on a town council when I first started and then it became a town board.

RM: What authority did the town council have?

PM: Like I said, not any. We'd meet and talk about what we wanted to do and we'd make our decisions and take them to Tonopah and they'd override them. Before we had a town council, we would meet and talk about things. At first we used to govern through pretty much the Pahrump Valley-Amargosa Valley Cooperative Association—that's the group that put the power in. The men belonged to that and they kind of governed to a certain extent. And there was a women's club and if we had anything really important, the men came and we all discussed it together there. Basically we'd govern ourselves.

It went from there to having a group. The first group we had was Frank Woner and Allen Simpkins and Nadine Garland. We didn't want the cattle roaming all through town and so they passed a petition that everybody wanted to have a town council and the first thing we wanted on the council law was no roaming cattle. They actually passed it. I don't remember what year that was, but they were instrumental in starting the town council. At first we had the PTA and the women's club and the Pahrump-Amargosa Valley Club.

We had a big meeting at the PTA one time. Somebody wanted to change the name of Pahrump to "Palm Springs, Nevada." That was Walt Williams. He brought his lawyer out and they all came down—there were 100 people there. There were 99 votes for it to stay "Pahrump Valley" and one for it to change. [Laughter]

RM: That is a wonderful story.

PM: It was so funny.

RM: Who was in the Pahrump-Amargosa Valley Club?

PM: It was the men of Amargosa and Pahrump. Who's that guy that was over in Amargosa for so long?

RM: Hank Records?

PM: Yes. He gave me all the records from that group. I don't know what I've done with them but I have them somewhere.

RM: Hank was wonderful. So the men would get together from Amargosa and Pahrump.

PM: They were trying to get the power in.

RM: Did the town council have a legal charter or anything like that?

PM: Yes, they passed something.

RM: And then that evolved into the town board, and now you have a town board.

PM: We still have the same town board structure we had then with the same taxing authority. And I think we need to go on and incorporate. I don't think that would take away

from anybody but I think it would certainly add to our ability to govern ourselves. Because really, we're still not an entity unto ourselves. Of course, Nevada is not a home-rule state. It's all ruled from Carson City.

RM: That's really interesting. Let's talk about bringing in the electric power. When you moved here there wasn't any power.

PM: That's true. When they brought it in, they had a big construction crew. They lived down on the corner in our little trailer park we put in. The survey crew lived there. They surveyed all through the whole place and then they came in and put it in and I think they finally turned it on in 1963.

RM: Do you recall much about the lead-up to getting power in here?

PM: There wasn't a fight about it; we really wanted it. But we had to go REA to get it and it was important to be able to include everybody. Of course there was no hook-up charge, or if there was it was very minor. And there were no land extension charges so we really racked up a bill in the early days because we weren't paying for ourselves. It became very expensive but, of course, we paid it off.

RM: Do you remember any details leading up to getting it? I remember Hank Records telling me it wasn't a slam-dunk thing and that it was a lot of work.

PM: A lot of us really had to work pretty hard. Elmer Bowman was influential in that and Hank Records. I don't know if Tim Hafen worked on that or not but I think he might have.

RM: And you had your gas station and everything before you had power?

PM: Yes. Well, we had power. The cotton gin company had a huge generator across the street and Walt Williams and the Pahrump Ranch was on it and our service station was on it. We all split the fuel bill.

RM: Where was the gin?

PM: The gin was right across the street where the Nugget is, but not as far back as the Nugget. It was in the parking lot.

RM: So, you were right across from the gin. What was it like having a gin across the street? Was it noisy?

PM: No; we didn't pay any attention to it, I guess. It was really quite nice. Having a gin in Pahrump was a big thing because we'd had to haul the cotton over to Bakersfield before that. My husband helped build the gin.

RM: And would the local wagons drop the cotton off at the gin?

PM: Yes. And one of the favorite places for the kids to go was over to the cotton seed pile in the evening. [Laughter] They'd go over there and hide from their parents.

RM: Was it a big pile?

PM: Yes, maybe 20 feet tall.

RM: Oh, my goodness, I had no idea. And then they would haul that out, eventually?

PM: Yes. And they baled the cotton and took it away.

I remember I thought it was really interesting when they were digging up Ted Binion's money. [Laughter] Of course I wasn't living there anymore but that was an interesting concept.

RM: Where was his money?

PM: He'd buried it up there at the gin. The gin was here and then there was a thing over here like a cement-type thing. I understand they dug that up and put the money there. It wasn't on the Binion property.

RM: The money was under the pad?

PM: Or around and by it. They dug this huge hole and put this money down there and buried it.

RM: And who did that?

PM: Rick somebody-or-other and Sandy Murphy.

RM: Now, you had one final thing you wanted to say?

PM: I felt that Bill and I were involved in every step of the way in the growth and development of Pahrump Valley until I quit about five years ago. I haven't done much of anything since so I leave it up to my children.

RM: Yes, pass it to the next generation. Thanks so much for talking with me.

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